
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

GULF ISLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT SIGNS ABORIGINAL AGREEMENT

SALT SPRING ISLAND – Education Minister Shirley Bond and Aboriginal leaders and officials from the Gulf Islands board of education today announced the signing of B.C.'s 34th Aboriginal education enhancement agreement to help improve Aboriginal student performance.

"With this new agreement the Gulf Islands school district and Aboriginal communities will be better able to help students achieve their best, by identifying and addressing their specific needs," said Bond.

There are 66 Aboriginal students in the Gulf Islands school district this year, about four per cent of the district's total enrolment. The district serves the Tsartlip, Tseycum, W'Ilkseum and Penalukut First Nations, in addition to Aboriginal and Metis students from across North America.

This first enhancement agreement has set three specific goals in the areas of academics, culture, personal development and positive learning environments. The goals are to improve Aboriginal student:

- Academic success and excellence;
- Sense of belonging and youth leadership; and
- Cultural appreciation and respect for the traditional teachings of the elders and their wisdom.

"We are building new relationships with B.C.'s Aboriginal people, and one way we're doing that is by working with them to develop enhancement agreements," said Bond. "By collaborating with Aboriginal communities and school districts, we are ensuring that the academic and cultural needs of Aboriginal students are being met so that they can achieve their best."

"As an Aboriginal parent, it is wonderful to see First Nations culture being embraced," said Sharon Jinkerson-Brass, a member of the district's Aboriginal enhancement committee. "There is so much wisdom in our culture, and I hope this agreement has a positive and magical effect on all the students."

"The district and the board of education are confident that the implementation of our new agreement will help us make changes that will be good not only for just Aboriginal learners, but for all learners, educators and families in our communities," said Jeff Hopkins, superintendent for the Gulf Islands school district. "We are happy to build on the successes that our Aboriginal students already enjoy in our district."

- 2 -

Thirty-four B.C. school districts have signed Aboriginal education enhancement agreements to date. The agreements support the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda to build new relationships with First Nations, and to close gaps in health, housing, education and economic opportunities, and are one component of the Province's strategy to improve Aboriginal student achievement. Others include the new First Nations education jurisdiction agreement and developing Aboriginal content for K-12 curriculum.

The Province is investing an estimated \$51.1 million a year – \$1,014 per student – for Aboriginal education in 2007-08. The funds are used to support Aboriginal language and culture programs, Aboriginal support service programs, and other localized Aboriginal education programs.

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